

Wise Men Say by Dysfunctional-Nom-De-Plume

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Summary: Jonathan's eighteenth birthday was drawing near, but with all of the extraordinary changes that had happened in the past few months, it had completely slipped everyone's minds, including Jonathan himself. Or at least, that's what he thought. Jancy

1. Chapter 1

Inspired by a picture I found as I was mindlessly scrolling down Pinterest, of Natalia Dyer and Charlie Heaton with a guitar.

"Take my hand. Take my whole life too, cause I can't help falling in love with you"-Can't Help Falling in Love, Elvis Presley

6:00 pm, the Byers Household.

The boys and El were out in the woods, collecting twigs, rocks, and other 'cool stuff' to decorate El's room (Will's old room before he elected to bunk with Jonathan to give the girl her privacy). At first, everyone was reluctant to venture far into the woods, bad memories of the horrific events still fresh in their conscious. Surprisingly, it was Will, the one with most reason to stay away, who convinced them that they needed to go out.

"I don't want this to be the defining factor in my life. I don't want this to take away the fun that we've had in the woods."

El, always so quiet and reserved, spoke up. "Yes. Brother is right,"

Will smiled back at his adoptive sister, relishing in the fact that she had finally begun to refer to him and Jonathan as her brothers.

So the five kids started re-entering the forest. At first, it was only for a few minutes, then for a half hour, then for almost an hour.

But the thing that got them to fully return was on the issue of privacy in the Byers home. Or the lack thereof.

Jonathan's eighteenth birthday was drawing near, but with all of the extraordinary changes that had happened in the past few months, it had completely slipped everyone's minds, including Jonathan himself. Or at least, that's what he thought.

A low murmur of voices had alerted Jonathan to the kids' presence in the kitchen. Silent as he was, he ghosted to the door and opened it without being noticed by anyone.

"We need to make it the best birthday he's had yet," Will was saying.
"I have a great idea for his present."

"What?" Dustin questioned eagerly, grinning.

"A-"

"Jonathan!" the three other boys interrupted, crying out at the realization that their secret was about to be spoiled.

"What are you doing here?" his brother shot out.

"It's my house, too."

"At least let us know when you get home"

"Man, we should put a bell on him"

"What is 'birthday'?"

The dissolving of the order in the room, with Dustin arguing with Jonathan about a cat collar, and Lucas and Mike trying to explain the concept of birthday to El, gave Will the understanding that, as much as he wanted to, he couldn't stay away from scary places forever. Especially not if they were trying to keep a secret from his sneaky brother.

"Guys," Will told his friends once his brother left, or rather, been forcibly removed from the room and order had returned, "I think that we should go to the forest to make it."

Silence. Then, a chorus of agreements.

With that settled, the pack began to walk out the door, past the shed, and into the trees.

"But Will," Mike stopped, and the rest of the kids paused as well.

"Yeah?"

"What exactly are we gonna do in the forest?"

"C'mon." He tipped his head in the direction of his old castle. "I'll tell

you guys along the way,"

When she returned home that evening after work, Joyce panicked at not seeing Will in his room. She bursted into Jonathan's room, visibly worried, but before she could say a word, Jonathan spoke up.

"They're in the woods. I guess they're planning a secret for my birthday and they need their 'privacy'."

"Oh... Okay." She made to leave. "But don't you think that,"

"Mom," Jonathan stood up, removing his headphones. He put his hands on her shoulder, his eyes serious. "They are fine. The monster is gone, and so are the bad men. You know that they can't spend the rest of their lives indoors."

Joyce smiled softly, wondering at the sudden wisdom of her eldest son. Just when had he grown up?

AN: For those of you who are reading Konoha's Best, I'm not abandoning that piece. I just found this story, mostly complete, just sitting in my drive, so I decided to polish it up a bit and post it. I'll get back to KB probably sometime next week

2. Chapter 2

So, it really wasn't that much of a surprise for Joyce when Jonathan's eighteenth birthday came. In her mind, he was already an adult, had already been an adult for quite some time now, but she still teared up, sitting around the dining table with everyone else as he hesitated, closing his eyes for a brief second, before blowing out the eighteen flickering candles atop the delicately frosted cake, thanks to the older Wheeler sibling.

"What did you wish for?" Will asked, smiling eagerly.

"You know the rules, bud," Jonathan grinned, "I can't say my wish aloud, or else it won't come true."

"All right, time for presents," Dustin shouted, ever the enthusiast.

"Don't you think we should eat the cake first?" Jonathan responded, making a show of cutting the first slice from the cake, an extra large chunk of chocolate cake. "Or should I just keep it all to myself?"

"Wait, no! Present time later. Cake time now." The party laughed, and Joyce set about cutting the cake into slices and distributing it to the eager guests.

"Nancy, dear, could you run into the kitchen and grab a couple more plates, please," Joyce requested, counting the dwindling supply of plates in her hand.

"Sure thing."

Joyce placed cake onto the available plates and handed them around to the rest of the party. Unfortunately, as she was walking around the table, she slipped on a dog toy left on the floor, and dropped the slice intended for Hopper.

"I'll grab the broom," Jonathan excused himself, grinning at his mother's clumsiness.

"Yeah," Hopper responded as he dropped to his knees, struggling to keep the excited dog from scarfing down the deadly chocolate

delicacy now decorating the floor.

Jonathan walked into the kitchen, and stopped short. Nancy was there, jumping futilely up to reach a stack of plates on the top shelf of the cupboards. Unable to stop himself, he snorted.

Nancy wheeled around. "Am I amusing you?"

"No," he laughed. "It's just that, we battled an actual boogeyman, and you're having trouble getting a few plates,"

"Well, why don't you just help me instead of making fun of me," she huffed.

Jonathan strode across the room, and reached over Nancy to get the plates.

Nancy leaned back, her hands supporting her on the table. She looked up at Jonathan, noticing the rising blush as he realized how close they were.

"Thanks," she stammered,

"No problem," he whispered. Nancy's mind wandered back to a few weeks ago, back to her room on the night she went Upside Down, how they whispered comforts to each other that night with the same hesitance, the same gentleness currently in his voice. The glint in his eye told Nancy that he was remembering it as well.

"You okay?" he asked quietly, "Really okay?"

"Yeah," she answered automatically. From anyone else, the disbelief in his face would have immediately turned her defensive. But this was Jonathan. "It's the nightmares," she admitted quietly, hating the vulnerability in her voice.

"I know. The last time I had a good night's sleep was," Jonathan broke off, turning red, "Never mind."

This time it was her turn to stare him down until he finished his thought. "Well, with you. That night."

"Me too." Nancy could have sworn that Jonathan began to lean in closer. But, the next thing she knew, he was a few steps away, grabbing a broom from the wall. Wistful thinking.

"I'd better get back" he said shortly , but he paused before he left the room. "Hey, Nance," he walked back to her, and enveloped her in a hug, "Try not to worry about it. Things are gonna get better. Just wait."

She sighed into him, breathing in his woodsy scent. "Yeah," she murmured.

"Jonathan. hurry up. Your dog is going crazy," pleaded Mike from the living room.

Nancy released her arms, and Jonathan stepped back. He hesitated, and seemed on the verge of speech, but only smiled at her comfortingly and left. Nancy released a breath she didn't remember holding, then smoothed her hair nervously as she left the kitchen, clutching the plates close.

3. Chapter 3

After the mess had been cleaned away and everyone had a slice of cake or two, Joyce came around to collect the trash, clearing the table.

"Okay, now it's present time," Dustin eagerly insisted, puppy dog eyes full force upon the birthday boy.

"All right, then."

Dustin scrambled to the door, reaching out for a present hidden from sight, but before he could return Hopper smacked down a thin package, wrapped in a simple blue paper.

"Sorry, kid," the chief swiped, "gotta be faster next time."

Jonathan accepted the present gratefully, tearing the wrapping off the package. Inside were some of the cassettes of his favorite bands.

"Whoa," he exclaimed, "This is so cool. Thanks, Hopper"

The older man blushed, not wanting to meet any of the Byers' eyes. "You're welcome," he shrugged.

"This one next," Joyce shouted before the kids could butt in. She handed her oldest son a small rectangular package. Jonathan opened the present, and, gasping, pulled out an old gold watch, rather worn looking, but obviously well cared for.

"It was my father's. Your grandfather's." Joyce sniffed. "Try it on."

He pulled the wristwatch out delicately, holding it in the light for a moment, just to admire the way it reflected the light.

"Thanks, Mom" exhaled the boy as he snapped the watch onto place around his wrist. She nodded, her eyes sparkling with bittersweet tears.

Ignoring the sweet scene between mother and son, Dustin raced outside to the porch, where the kids had stashed their project. Mike

trailed after him, waiting at the door to hold it open as the curly haired boy staggered inside with a brown box.

Nancy stepped forward with a tiny gift bag. "Happy Birthday," she offered.

"Guitar picks?" He asked, confusedly drawing out two picks from the bag. "But, I don't have a guitar."

"Here," Will grinned, "open ours."

He acquiesced, removing the lid from the box.

Jonathan's jaw dropped. "This is for me?"

A chorus of "yeah"'s responded eagerly.

"How- How did you guys get it?" he stammered out, pulling the acoustic guitar out from the box as delicately as a mother would her newborn baby.

"El made it," Will stated proudly.

"Friends helped," El blushed modestly.

"Yeah," Dustin agreed, "We did most of it. El just shaped the wood with her mind. We sanded it down and painted it and got the strings."

"We all worked on it," Lucas said, shoving Dustin.

"Do you like it?" Will asked.

"Like it? I love it!" Jonathan's wide smile broke out as he laughed. "She's beautiful."

A soft 'pop' drew everyone's attention to Nancy, who stood with Jonathan's camera around her neck. "I thought that we needed a good picture of you for once." She said. At Jonathan's blush, Joyce smiled fondly, grateful for this girl that finally gave her son a friend.

Jonathan began picking the strings, looking for familiar sounds.

"I don't know how to play guitar."

Silence, as all the kids realized the obvious drawback to their plan at the same time. Then, Jonathan started laughing. Hopper snorted. As though a flood broke, they all started laughing, everyone bent over, clutching their stomach, tears collecting at the edges of their eyes. After all that their family had been through, it felt good to find a simple problem with a simple solution.

When the laughter finally subsided, Joyce called out, "I'm sure big-city cop Hop knows a thing or two about guitars."

Jonathan raised an eyebrow playfully at his mother, smirking. She wasn't looking at him, however. Her gaze was directed at the cop, a challenging expression on her face.

"Y'know what kid," Hopper started, turning to face the teen, "You can come over whenever you want. I'll teach you everything I know. "

4. Chapter 4

After a few more hours of party games and half finished guitar lessons, Nancy couldn't ignore her brother's loud yawns punctuating the night, despite his futile attempts to hide his exhaustion from her with loud and cheerful jokes.

"Say goodnight, buddy," she shoved him gently to his friends, giving him a glare that told him to not argue with her decision, before making her way to the door. Jonathan followed, opening the door like the gentleman his mother wanted him to be, even if she wasn't there to witness his manners, as she was busy, deep in conversation with the cop in the kitchen.

"Thanks for inviting us," Nancy said, leaning against the doorway as she waited for her brother to come.

"No problem. They're good kids," Jonathan responded, grinning mischievously, "but you'd better keep your brother away from my sister,"

She smirked, taking the bait. "Oh, so you think that it's my brother that's chasing after El? That's funny, because the way I see it, she's not exactly doing anything to discourage him."

Jonathan scoffed good naturedly, "El is just a friendly girl."

"Oh, about as friendly as her oldest brother."

"Probably more so."

The truth behind this statement sent the two teens laughing. As the laughter faded away, Jonathan's smile did to.

"Listen," Jonathan's voice became serious, and as he stepped forward, Nancy's heart flipped. "I try to be there for El, but there are some things that I don't know,"

"You're a great brother, you know that right? You're doing a great job." She assured him, eyes wide to convey the truth.

"Yeah, but," he blushed, "I don't know much about girls. Stuff that El might ask about. And I can tell that she really looks up to you. I know that I am asking for a lot, but if El has questions about anything, I would like it that she learns from you. I mean, if you don't mind, of course."

Nancy smiled, touched that Jonathan wanted to include her in his little family. "Of course. El can come to me for whatever. In fact, I wanted to take her shopping before school starts next year."

"Yeah?" Jonathan asked hopefully.

"Yeah." Nancy deflated slightly. "But, you know, I'm not the best role model for a little girl. I've done plenty of things that I wish I could take back."

"Haven't we all. But if El does come to you, for advice, I trust you." Jonathan scratched his neck awkwardly, "I mean, you've been in serious relationships before." He coughed. "You're in one now"

"Actually, Steve and I broke up," He looked up, the shadows of the night not letting Nancy read his expression. "It just felt different. After everything."

"Oh."

"Yeah." Mike came outside, shattering the serenity of the night. He walked to the car, yawning loudly into the night, and Nancy made to leave, then stopped. She walked back up the stairs, and, gathering her courage, kissed Jonathan softly on the cheek. "Happy Birthday, Jonathan"

5. Chapter 5

The guitar chords are coming along nicely, Jonathan thought sarcastically. At this rate, *I'll be an expert by the time I'm fifty*. He had never quite appreciated the effort that was needed to play an instrument, instead of just listening to one, until he was put up to the task.

C'mon. Concentrate. Jonathan realized, as so many do, that complete focus on the task at hand led to the best results. He picked his way through the beginning of the exercises, confidence growing as he continued without a mistake.

Until there was a knock at the door. His concentration shaken, Jonathan's hands lost their position, and his strumming turned sour. He sighed, getting up to see who it was.

"Nancy." Jonathan smiled, "Come in." He opened the door, welcoming the girl in. "Mike and the rest of the kids are at Castle Byers. They should be back in a few minutes, though. Mom already scolded them for coming home after sundown." He shook his head, "Honestly, it's like nothing happened."

"Except that now you have a sister."

Jonathan grinned fondly, thinking about the girl that came to completely overrun their lives. Nancy blushed, staring at the goofy smile on his face. They sat on the sofa, where the guitar lay discarded next to them.

"Well, don't let me stop you. Continue playing," she ordered.

"Oh, trust me, you don't want to hear that,"

"So, are you a pro at guitar now, or what?" Nancy joked, smiling.

"Yeah, something like that," Jonathan scoffed. He rubbed his hands together, trying to get a not-numb feeling back in them.

"May I?" Nancy asked suddenly, gesturing to the guitar.

"Yeah. Of course." Jonathan stammered.

She reverently lifted the instrument, brushing her palm against the rosewood. Then, she hefted it onto her lap, holding it like a natural.

"Okay. How do I play?"

Jonathan reached around her, adjusting her fingers to the proper place.

"Keep your left hand pressing down here, and" He set her right hand to the strings, "strum the strings,"

Nancy did so, laughing softly when a soft musical sound emanated from the guitar. She turned her head towards Jonathan, careful to not move her hands from their position. "Like that?" she asked.

"Yeah," he nodded.

"Cool." She turned back to look at the guitar again. Nancy strummed again, but then felt a familiar prickling sensation start in her left hand. She hastily put the guitar down, and clenched her left hand, hiding it behind her body.

"I have to um, go to the bathroom," she stammered as she exited the room. As she turned around, Nancy brought her hand to her front. Locking herself in the bathroom, she bit back a cry of pain. The wound she had inflicted onto her hand before the final battle, much like the one in her heart, hadn't healed as well as she hoped, although Nancy supposed this one was her fault. She kept on picking at her hand every time she passed Barb's locker, or passed Mirkwood, or turned, half laughing, to point something out to her absent best friend, swallowing down the bitter grief as reality struck, and she realized she was alone.

The pain passed.

Nancy sighed, pressing her still-warm palm against the cool mirror. She turned on the faucet, splashing water onto her hands. Drying them on her pants, she took a deep breath to steady her nerves, and exited the room.

Jonathan picked up his precious gift carefully, confused at the girl's abrupt departure. Shaking his head, he returned to picking out chords.

Rather, he started to. However, when he adjusted his left hand to the strings, he felt something strange. He removed his hand, flipping the guitar to the back. A sticky crimson liquid clinged to the wood, barely noticeable against the russet wood. Jonathan cringed.

Blood. But where did it come...

Jonathan shot up, realization striking him like a dagger through the heart. He strode to the bathroom, where Nancy was just exiting.

"Oh hey," she started, then trailed off. The look on Jonathan's face told her that he knew something was wrong.

Immediately, a defensive tone shot through her voice. "What?" she accused.

He said nothing. Instead, he reached out to her left hand, bringing it up to the light. The harsh fluorescent glare of the hallway made the red inflammation look worse. He frowned up at Nancy, and she averted her eyes, unable to stomach the look in his eyes.

She snatched back her hand. "This is none of your business,"

"Damnit Nancy, it's not the time for that. This is a serious injury."

"Don't patronize me," she muttered prickly, "I'm not two. I can take care of myself and my cut, thank you."

He scrutinized her carefully, wondering where the anger had come from. "Yeah," he shot back, "I can tell. Great job you're doing so far, Nancy."

She shoved him back with her right hand. "You wouldn't understand,"

He gaped at her. "How can you say that? After all that we went through."

Nancy's stomach churned guiltily for a second, breaking through the

cloud of anger. But she quickly stifled it, unwilling to succumb to the sadness that always followed the rage.

"Don't. Don't come at me with... with that bull," she scoffed.

Jonathan could feel his anger rising. "With what? With the truth? News flash, Nancy. You're not the only one that has to cope with the aftermath. I wake up in the middle of the night and hear my brother crying in his sleep, and I can't do anything to help him."

"At least you still have your brother! Barb-" Nancy broke off, her voice faltering, before continuing in a weak voice, her eyes burning with tears. She focused on a spot on the floor by her feet, not willing to see the anger in Jonathan's face. "I couldn't save her. It was my fault she was there, that she was taken, and I couldn't even save her."

They had reached it: the underlying issue, the real problem.

She looked back into Jonathan's eyes. "So, no. We're not the same. I'm- I'm glad for you, I really am, but it still hurts so much. It's just, it's not fair. Why couldn't I have been able to save Barb like you saved Will?"

Unconsciously, she began to clench her hands; the stark contrast between white nail polish and crimson droplets forming drew Jonathan's attention.

He gently collected her hands into his, smoothing her palms out. "This has to stop, Nancy. You can't continue like this."

"I know, but I... I just can't. Every day at school, her empty chair reminds me of how I wasn't strong enough to save her. How I let her down." Her anger failing, Nancy's tears soon overwhelmed her fragile resistance, and flowed freely down her cheeks as the thoughts of desperation ricocheting in her mind finally found escape in the form of words.

Jonathan drew the fragile-looking girl into a hug. "Shhh," he comforted, rubbing her back, not unlike how he did when Will woke with cold sweat and a nightmare in his eyes, "It's okay. Crying helps. Just let it out."

They continued this way, him whispering sweet nothings into her ear, her finally allowing herself to feel the pain in the shelter of his arms, until her tears began to subside.

"Are you feeling better?" he inquired softly.

"Yeah," she sniffled, "I am."

She glanced up at him, and offered him a fragile, watery smile.

Jonathan reached for her hand again, gently, and traced the mark on her palm with his hand. He interlaced his fingers with his, lining up the two scars.

"Jonathan." Nancy used her other hand to lift his face to meet his eyes, the frown on his face warning her of his inner turmoil. She could see the pain in his eyes, burdened in the fact that their ordeal had left her scarred, in more ways than one, and felt bad that she hadn't thought about how he had been feeling. "Don't. It's not your fault."

His face clouded over, and he averted his gaze. "Hey," she spoke quietly, with the softness one adopts to comfort a wounded animal, "No. None of this was your fault. You tried your best. Like you said, we tried our best. Besides, you didn't make me do it. "She promised, referring to their self-inflicted injuries. Her tone grew light. "I don't take orders from anyone."

Jonathan smiled. "I already know that. But still, to have such a visible, ugly scar. I'm okay with mine. I always will be. But what if you change your mind. What if you wake up one day, and realize how ugly it is. How much better your life would be better without me."

Nancy inhaled sharply at the Freudian slip. As his eyes widened in surprise, Jonathan disentangled their hands. He started walking away, and was almost at the door, when a hand caught in his again. He turned back, as Nancy traced his scar with both her hands. She looked up at him, stepping closer.

Jonathan leaned in, eyes scanning her face hesitantly. "Nancy," he

murmured, his breath dusting across her face.

"Yeah," she whispered.

"I-" Jonathan started.

Nancy closed her eyes, leaning in. "Kiss me" she breathed.

And he did. Hesitantly, he closed the distance between them, softly brushing his lips against hers. He was about to pull back, when she let go of his hands, wrapping her arms around his neck. He drew her closer.

And then the front door creaked open. The chatter of the kids filled the house. Nancy and Jonathan jumped apart. Will, Dustin, and Lucas brushed past them to reach El's room without noticing anything, but Mike glanced quizzically at his sister before following his friends, and El smiled faintly at her older brother.

"Uh, Mike," Nancy cleared her throat, "It's time to get home."

"Yeah, just a second," he called from the other room.

Nancy listened for his goodbyes, then turned to face Jonathan.

"Hey," she said, "I'll talk to you later."

"Um. Yeah. Yeah." He stammered, smiling goofily at her.

Mike sneaked out of the door, trying to make it to Will's room unnoticed.

"Mike, c'mon. Mom's going to nag me if I bring you home too late."

The siblings exited together, walking peacefully to the car.

"So," Mike suggested, "Jonathan, huh. Well, I've always seen Will as a brother." Peace shattered, the pair argued all the way home.

-Fin-

AN: I don't know why that took me so long to finish. Like I said, it was practically finished from the beginning. Oh well, here is

the last chapter. Let me know if you liked it, hated it, were indifferent to it, or whatever. I love reviews, and flames only serve to fuel the fire of my self-hatred so... Anyways, thanks for the reviews.